

MAKING ASSUMPTIONS IN NADINE GORDIMER'S *THE PICKUP*

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Nadine Gordimer's *The Pickup* (2001) – sometimes criticised for its unsatisfactory lack of resolution, the distance at which it keeps its characters, their improbable decisions, its unconvincing lack of realism – closely focuses on the repeated, often unconscious falling into making assumptions about the foreign other; on the processes through which habitual modes of language or gestures may lead into stereotyping, categorizing, highlighting the dilemma of needing to choose between not treating the other as other and openly acknowledging difference – an openness that may however turn out to be the opposite of acceptance. Through this focus on character and gestures, on literary creation as psychological and social investigation, the novel explores South Africa's struggle to realise the racial and cultural renewal that the end of Apartheid had promised, showing that the country's multiculturalism and opportunity for transcultural social reorganisation are still failing to achieve the transformative reciprocity that meaningful intercultural dialogue requires. At the same time, through its adoption of a self-conscious narrative voice that frequently eschews the illusions of realism, the novel asks how personal integrity, intimacy and relationships can survive the mismatch of aspirations and values in the unequal postcolonial, post-apartheid, globalised world. The novel is thus deeply concerned with relationships across boundaries that are both personal and collective, both national and cultural, both social and ethnic; and with exploring, in its form as much as in its content, the difficult negotiations that any form of interculturality demands.

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